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HERM AND I

MYRON B. GIBSON.





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HERM AND I



" Throwing up his long arms, he fell forward "

Herm and I

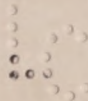
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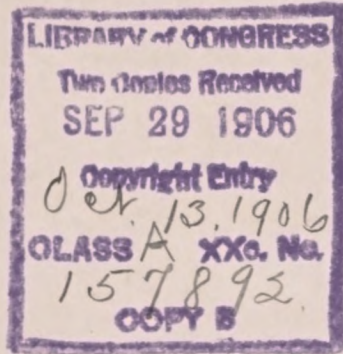
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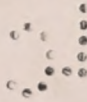
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TRAPPING ON THE MINNESOTA

Herm and I

A Story of the Minnesota Massacre

CHAPTER I

TRAPPING ON THE MINNESOTA

WHEN I was eight years old my father, with other hardy pioneers, settled on the banks of the Minnesota River, in the edge of that great belt of hardwood timber known as "The Big Woods." There were no railroads in Minnesota then, and all things were wild and new. The settlers were nearly all poor, but the wonderfully fertile soil and the profusion of game and fish made it easy for an industrious man to feed his family well. No more happy and contented pioneers were ever settled in a new country.

Our nearest neighbor was a German named

Herm and I

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CHAPTER I

TRAPPING ON THE MINNESOTA

WHEN I was eight years old my father, with other hardy pioneers, settled on the banks of the Minnesota River, in the edge of that great belt of hardwood timber known as "The Big Woods." There were no railroads in Minnesota then, and all things were wild and new. The settlers were nearly all poor, but the wonderfully fertile soil and the profusion of game and fish made it easy for an industrious man to feed his family well. No more happy and contented pioneers were ever settled in a new country.

Our nearest neighbor was a German named

HERM AND I

Weisman, whose oldest boy, Herman, or "Herm," as we called him, was my chum in those happy boyhood days. Of about the same age, we two were both very fond of outdoor life, and when not at work upon our fathers' farms were sure to be off on some hunting or fishing expedition.

With hard work, sufficient sport, and plenty of plain, wholesome food boys soon develop, and at the age of sixteen we were nearly men grown, and as hardy as Indians. We could handle a rifle or canoe with any one of the many young Sioux whom we met in our excursions.

There were thousands of those warlike Indians in Minnesota at that time. Outlying settlements often suffered from their depredations; but up to the time of which I write nothing like a general outbreak had occurred.

After we were fourteen years old Herm and I were allowed to spend a month or six weeks each autumn trapping along the banks of

HERM AND I

creeks and lakes emptying into the river above the settlements. Skins and furs found a ready sale at good prices, and the settlers depended as much upon their rifles and traps for ready money as upon the products of their farms.



“ On the banks of the Minnesota ”

Every boy, as soon as he was old enough to handle a rifle, was encouraged to become a good shot and a skilful trapper.

Our yearly trapping excursion in the fall was the event to which we looked forward

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with the liveliest anticipation. We worked early and late to get the fall work done, in order that we might start as soon as possible after the first hard frost, which gave lustre to the fur, and which usually comes in Minnesota about the first of October.

The streams were seldom free of ice later than the middle of November, and as their freezing over interfered with our hunting, we worked very industriously at the fall plowing, which had to be finished before we could depart.

We owned in partnership a neat birch-bark canoe, which we used on all our trips. One of these shorter trips we usually took just after harvest, about the middle of August. Then, as the ground was too dry to plow and there was no other work to do, we went for a fortnight up the river. Deer-hunting was excellent at that season, the meat fat and juicy, the hides good, and we seldom failed to kill a dozen or two good bucks.

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We cut the meat into long strips an inch or two in thickness, and strung them upon slim rods of willow or hazel. These, after salting the meat, we suspended three or four feet from the ground upon a scaffold of crotched sticks and poles. Under this we kept a small fire, by whose heat and smoke the meat would, in two or three days, become so well cured that it would keep a long time.

Though we usually brought home a canoe-load of meat, and enough deerskins to pay us well for our time and labor, our main object on these early trips was to select the best grounds for trapping later in the autumn. We would paddle up every little creek to examine its banks, as well as the shores of small lakes and ponds, for signs of beaver and otter.

In that latitude fur-bearing animals begin to make preparations for the winter as early as the first of September. The summer litter of young animals are then well grown. By the number of otter "slides" upon the banks and

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the gnawing off of saplings around beaver ponds it was easy for us to determine where we should find the best trapping that season. So when the last "dead-furrow" was turned, which marked the close of the farm-work, we knew where to go with our traps.

I think I never enjoyed anything more than the first trapping excursion which Herm and I made by ourselves. We had been out with our fathers on several such trips, but during the fall when we were fourteen years old my father and Mr. Weisman were busy building a log barn. We could not be of much assistance, and after a great deal of coaxing and persuasion on our part, we were permitted to go up the river alone.

We had already prepared our camp outfit and molded a large pouchful of bullets for our rifles, so that we were ready to start as soon as the plowing was done.

Our provisions for the trip consisted of fifty pounds of flour, some beans, salt, sugar and



"We owned a neat birch-bark canoe"

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coffee, with a tin can full of mixed soda and cream of tartar with which to make flapjacks. We took a frying-pan, coffee-pot and camp-kettle, a tin plate and cup apiece, our hunting knives and a few iron spoons. Our outfit included two pairs of heavy blankets for our bed, a small tent made of deerskins, eighteen steel traps, our guns, an axe and a good supply of ammunition.

Herm came over to stay with me, and we had everything safely stowed away in the canoe the night before we were to start. My father's log house stood on the bank of the river, and the next morning at sunrise we pushed the canoe into the stream.

I seated myself in the bow. Herm was in the stern. My mother and sisters came down to the water's edge to say good-by and caution us not to shoot each other nor get scalped by the Sioux. We laughed at this advice, and bade them all a cheery good-by. Our paddles flashed in the morning sunlight, and away we went up-stream.

HERM AND I

Our mode of trapping was to paddle up each little creek that emptied into the river on one side, ascend the creek as far as we could in our canoe—for we always found the best trapping near the heads of streams—stay there as long as abundant success rewarded us, then return to the main river, go up it to another chosen creek, and “work” this as the one before. When we had gone up the main river as far as we thought prudence permitted, we crossed over and trapped the streams on the other side on our way home.

This seemed to have been a prolific year for fur-bearing animals, and we had remarkable success from the start. Scarcely a morning passed that we did not find from one to three beavers or otters in our traps, besides perhaps a mink or two and half a dozen muskrats.

Herm was a famous cook, and as wild ducks and geese were as plentiful and nearly as tame as chickens in a barn-yard, we fared sumptuously every day. Sometimes we fried the

HERM AND I

birds, and sometimes broiled them over a bed of coals. But the dish we liked best was a stew of fat ducks and wild rice.



"Herm was a famous cook"

This rice grew in marshes around many of the small lakes. We would run our canoe into a thick patch of the grain, bend the stalks over the canoe, and thresh out a quart in a few min-

HERM AND I

utes, using our paddle handles for flails. This rice is a very palatable food. It still grows luxuriantly about the lakes in the northern part of Minnesota and Wisconsin, and forms the chief grain food of the Indians of that region to-day.

Our tent was only six feet wide, eight long, and six high, with one end open. There were no ropes about it. All we needed in pitching it was three sapling poles—one of them, eight feet long, for a ridge-pole, the others for up-rights. Throwing the tent over them we secured it to the ground by driving a peg through a hole at each of the four corners.

The deerskins of which it was made were tanned with the hair on, and sewed together so that the hair slanted downward like straw upon a thatched roof. This shed rain nicely, no matter how hard it might storm.

Herm and I had worked many a long evening tanning the hides and making this tent. It was a contrivance wholly our own, for my father and Mr. Weisman never used a tent

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when out trapping. How keenly we enjoyed its shelter during the frosty mornings and evenings, as we ate our meals or stretched and scraped the fresh skins that we had taken, while a big fire blazed cheerfully before the open end!

The third week after we left home we paddled up a creek about three miles long to a lake which formed its source, and there pitched our tent in the edge of thick woods. There we intended to camp at least a week, for we knew deer and bear to be plentiful in the neighborhood. Both of us longed to kill a bear, and have its hide to show our friends at home.

We reached the lake soon after noon and had time that evening to pitch our camp, catch a string of fish for bait and set all of our traps.

Two small creeks emptied into the lake and one flowed from it. We found three large beaver ponds on these streams within a mile of the lake, and dozens of well-worn "slides" where otters had engaged in their favorite

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moonlight sport of sliding head foremost down the steep bank into the deep water below.

We never baited our traps set for beaver, but expected the animals to step into them while at work upon their dams and houses. But for otter we baited with fish or wild fowl.

Sometimes we set traps at the foot of their slides, but as the water was always deep at such places we had to drive sticks into the bank a few inches under water for the traps to rest upon. This took much time and labor.

We found it easier and more successful to set traps near the slides at the less steep places where the otters crawled out of the water to ascend for another plunge.

As we paddled down the lake to camp that night we were in high spirits. Besides much "sign" of beaver and otter, we had seen numerous deer tracks, and we meant to make the round of our traps on foot the next morning in hopes of being able to kill a buck.

We often heard noises about our camp at

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night, but as we always put big chunks of wood on our fire so that it would burn until morning, we thought no animals would come very near.

That night, however, we had scarcely fallen asleep when we were suddenly awakened by the crackling of underbrush, and the tramping of some heavy animal which seemed to be prowling about very close to the tent.

I seized a stick of wood which lay near the bed, and hurled it upon the fire. As embers and sparks flew about, the brute rushed off into the woods with a snort which was not at all unlike that of a frightened pig.

"That 's a bear, sure enough," said Herm.

"That 's just what it was," I replied, "and unless he keeps pretty well hid daytimes we 'll have his hide before we break camp."

We had set all our traps on a creek which emptied into the upper end of the lake about two miles above camp. With the first glimpse of daylight next morning we set off to visit them, and found they held a fine catch. We

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skinned each animal as we came to it, reset and rebaited the trap and hurried on to the next one.

Thus we had visited about half of the traps when we came to one which we had set near an old beaver-dam. We had fastened this trap to a large root which extended out over the water, and which we were sure was too large and tough for a beaver to gnaw off in one night.

As soon as we came in sight of the trap we knew it held a big fellow, for the root had been savagely torn and deeply gnawed. Finding it impossible to free himself, the animal had jumped into deep water and been drowned. We ran to the spot, drew up the trap and found that it held the largest beaver we had ever caught.

Laying him on the bank we gloated over his long, glossy fur, and calculated the price it would bring at the fort. Then, while Herm was engaged in removing its skin, I set about finding a new place to set the trap.

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I had unfastened it from the root, and was about to climb up the bank when I happened to look over the top of the beaver-dam, which was about three feet high.

There, at the edge of the water on the farther side of the stream, stood a large four-point buck, his head held high while his great brown eyes stared at us as though we were the most curious creatures he had ever seen.

Without saying a word I caught up my rifle, which I had leaned against the root, and resting the barrel across the dam, aimed at his shoulder and fired. The deer sprang into the air and fell headlong in the water. Herm was so much startled by the sudden shot that he almost followed the deer's example.

"Well, that 's what I call luck!" said Herm, as he saw the buck floundering. It took both of us to haul the animal out of the creek.

Herm went back and finished skinning the beaver, while I dressed the deer and hung it up in the forks of a large sapling. We cut off the "saddle" and carried it to camp that night,

HERM AND I

intending to get the rest of the meat and the hide when we came up the creek the next day with the canoe.

Finding two more beavers in the remaining traps, we had five fine skins to stretch that night. We stretched them upon willow poles about seven feet long, bent in the shape of a horseshoe.

After scraping the fleshy side thoroughly with the backs of our hunting-knives to remove all particles of flesh and fat, we set the frames up before our fire, and in the daytime hung them in the sun. After several days of such treatment they were dry enough to take off the frames and tie up in bundles.

Next morning we paddled up the lake, and reaching the first trap, found it sprung. The bait was gone, and the soft, muddy bank was torn up with long tracks which sank deep in the mud, and were almost as large as a man's foot.

"It 's that rascally bear, as sure as fate!"

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exclaimed Herm. "I 'll warrant he 's followed up our tracks, or the scent of the bait, and served every trap in the same way."

That was just what the beast had undertaken to do. The next two traps we found sprung also, and the fish taken off of the bait sticks.

"Say, Herm!" I exclaimed, as a sudden thought struck me, "like as not the brute has got our deer, too!"

"Well," replied Herm, "what fools we were not to think of that before! Of course he 's got it, and eaten up the best part of it before this!"

We looked at each other aghast.

"But I 'll tell you what," Herm went on, "if he has got that deer we 'll have his hide to pay for it. He won't go far after he 's had all he wants to eat."

"Say," I cried, "let 's leave the canoe here and strike across through the woods. We may find him at the deer yet."

So we started off pell-mell after the bear.

A CARGO OF BEAR

HERM AND I

CHAPTER II

A CARGO OF BEAR

EAGER to shoot the bear, Herm and I struck through the forest and hurried along until we were near the dam.

Then, carefully noting the direction of the wind, which was quite strong, we crept toward the spot, keeping the wind in our faces.

We hardly expected to find the bear where we had left the deer, for it seemed likely that he would have eaten all he wanted and gone off to sleep through the day in the thick brush near by. So we were not a little surprised, when we emerged from a dense thicket of hazel brush through which we had crawled on our hands and knees, to find the old fellow squatted on his haunches, with his side toward us, while he feasted contentedly on the fat car-

HERM AND I

cass which he held on the ground between his forepaws.

I will not say that we were frightened, but from some cause our limbs shook at an astonishing rate. A strong wind prevented the bear from hearing or smelling us, and we had our wits about us enough to know that it would be foolhardy to fire at him while our hands trembled as they did. So we lay close to the ground until our nerves were more steady.

Then, rising upon our elbows, we aimed, Herm at his neck and I just back of his shoulder. We fired at the same instant.. We had each selected a tree and were ready to do some hasty climbing; but the bear rolled over and died almost without a struggle. Herm's bullet had broken his neck.

To say that we were elated would not describe our feelings. We danced and yelled with delight. We had killed our first bear, and a large one at that!

Of course we wanted to get him to camp be-



“ The old fellow squatted on his haunches ”

HERM AND I

fore skinning and cutting him up, in order that we might save all the fat and keep the meat in good condition; but how to do it was the question.

We soon hit upon a plan. I went back for



" We lay close to the ground "

the canoe, while Herm went farther up the creek to look after the rest of the traps. I brought the canoe up as far as the dam and fastened it under the edge of the creek bank, which was four or five feet high, covered with grass and overhanging the water. We meant

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to get the bear to the edge of the bank and slide it down into the canoe.

When Herm returned from the traps we set at work; and we had a wearisome time of it. The bear was extremely fat, and so soft and limp as to be very difficult to handle. We could get him along only by rolling him over and over.

It took a long time to bring him to the bank, but this proved only the beginning of our troubles. We knelt on the edge of the bank, and grasping the bear by the legs, rolled him slowly to its brink. We saw that the weight would be too much for us the moment he went over; but it was too late to stop then, and we dared not let go lest the carcass should knock the bottom out of the canoe.

Just at that moment the bank gave way, and down we went in a bunch. The bear happened to land in the canoe, but Herm and I fell into six feet of almost ice-cold water. Scrambling out, we found dry matches in the pockets of

HERM AND I

our coats which, luckily, we had pulled off and thrown down in a safe spot while tugging at the bear, and soon had a huge fire burning. While drying our clothes we roasted some of the venison, and ate a hearty lunch before starting down the creek for camp again.

We had noticed that the water was somewhat rough; before we reached the middle of the lake and began to feel the full force of the wind, we found that it required our utmost exertions to keep our frail craft from capsizing.

A birch-bark canoe is easily sprung out of shape. The three hundred pounds of bear meat sunk the middle of our craft, which had probably been badly shaken when the bear tumbled in, almost to the water's edge, while the stern and prow were much tilted up. We headed straight for camp and paddled for dear life, thinking we should be swamped if we tried to turn back.

We had gone some distance, being much pitched and rolled by the waves, when an un-

HERM AND I

usually large one caught us amidships and broke over the side. In trying to tilt the canoe so as to keep the water out we leaned over too far; the sea helped our weight, and before we could right ourselves she was half full of water that came over the lee side. We knew that the next heavy wave would probably send to the bottom bear, guns and all.

We could swim ashore well enough without our rifles, but we felt that we must save those at all hazards. Pulling off our boots and coats, we threw these in the bottom of the canoe, with our rifles on top to keep them from floating away, and sprang over the side into the chilly water.

One of us swam on each side. Grasping the gunwale with one hand to keep the canoe from capsizing, we struck out with the other hand as we drifted toward the shore a quarter of a mile away.

The water was icy cold. In spite of our vigorous exertions our limbs began to stiffen,

HERM AND I

until it required all our strength to retain our hold upon the gunwale, leaving the canoe to drift wholly at the mercy of the wind and waves. We expected every moment that it



"One of us swam on each side"

would swing round broadside to the wind and either capsize or fill and sink. But fortunately this did not occur. We had become so exhausted that it was a question of only a few

HERM AND I

moments how much longer we should be able to hang on, when at last we touched bottom with our feet. The lake was very shallow for some distance from the shore.

The drifting canoe helped us along to land, and when we did reach it we threw ourselves upon the tall, dry grass, chilled through and completely exhausted. But the bright sunshine soon warmed us. When we had regained our strength somewhat, we drew the canoe up the bank, took our boots and guns, and started for camp.

What a pile of dried meat and tallow that bear yielded, and what a fine black robe his hide made! It kept us busy every evening for a week trying out the fat, and it nearly half-filled a two-bushel bag, which was the only receptacle we had to put it in.

For two weeks longer we continued trapping, without any remarkable adventure, and then with our canoe well ballasted with furs, dried meat and tallow, we started down the

HERM AND I

river before daylight one morning, and reached home at dark that night.

Such rejoicing as there was over our return! And I think I never more than half appreciated my mother's cooking until we sat down to the supper which she spread for us that night.

Naturally we were very proud of our success. We had taken over one hundred dollars' worth of furs besides our bearskin, nearly as good a catch as father and Mr. Weisman had ever made. We were the envy of all the boys in the settlement, and felt as if we had grown about a foot in stature during the time we had been away from home.

Two years passed away after Herm and I made this, our first trapping expedition, and the last of August, 1862, found us again preparing for our regular yearly hunt. We were now almost men, and had arrived at man's stature none too soon; for the great Civil War was raging. Nearly all the able-bodied men in the settlements, my father and Herm's in-

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cluded, were away in the army, and each of us found the burden of a family's support chiefly resting upon him.

We had sown and harvested the usual crops of wheat and oats on both farms, but the season had been a dry one, and the crop was very light. Mother and Mrs. Weisman were both unwilling that we should leave home. Rumor had reached us that the Sioux Indians, realizing the unprotected condition of the settlements, were gathering their scattered bands and preparing to go upon the warpath.

But rumors of this kind were abroad every year at the same season, and as our stock of groceries was getting low, and owing to the short crops, we needed, for the purchase of our winter supplies, all the money we could get from the sale of hides and furs, our mothers bravely decided at last that we should undertake our usual yearly hunt.

But as a measure of safety I suggested that Herm's mother and her children should stay

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at our house while we were away. Herm's two brothers—twelve and fourteen years of age—were sturdy, manly boys, and would do their best to care for those we left at home.

We had noticed no unusual movement among the Indians in our neighborhood. Parties were occasionally seen going up or down the river in their canoes or across the country with their ponies from one hunting-ground to another, as was their custom at that season, but we had heard of no actual depredations. I advised my mother, however, in case further reports should confirm the bad rumors, not to wait for our return, but to drive the stock into the woods, load our bateau with what furniture and provisions it would hold, and row down to the fort, thirty miles away.

This bateau, which was always afloat and tied to the river shore in front of our house, would carry more than two tons. We often used it to transport farm produce down the river to the fort, bringing back to the settlement groceries and provisions.

HERM AND I

The day before we were to start Mrs. Weisman and her children took up their abode with my mother. We were not as jubilant as usual as we started for our trapping grounds up the river the next morning. There might be some truth in these Indian rumors, and we felt ourselves responsible for the safety of the two families.

We concluded not to go farther than thirty or forty miles from home, to watch sharply for signs of any unusual movement by the Sioux, and if these were found, to paddle home at once. Going with the current we could cover the distance easily in one day.

The first night out we reached the last settlement on the river, twenty miles from home, and camped there, but could learn nothing further about the Indians. The people seemed to be a little apprehensive, but many of them thought there was no real cause for fear.

After selecting a good camping-place about fifteen miles above the upper settlement, we

HERM AND I

hunted in the vicinity for ten days. Fur signs were abundant, and deer so plenty that at this camp we secured nearly half a cargo of dried meat and a dozen hides. Then we moved about five miles nearer our old camp on the bank of the lake where we had killed the bear two years before.

We had now been away from home nearly two weeks, and had not seen a single Indian. This was unusual, but we were so busy hunting and trapping that we gave the matter too little thought. It was not till we got our camp in order that we seriously considered the situation.

Herm was restless and did not sleep much that night. He was also silent and moody the next morning, while we were preparing breakfast, and I knew something was troubling him.

"Well, Herm," said I, after we had eaten in silence, "what is it that 's on your mind?"

"I 'll tell you," he replied. "I am anxious about the folks at home. We ought to have

HERM AND I

stayed there and taken care of them. We never have been out before without seeing dozens of Sioux camping along the streams and hunting like ourselves. We were thoughtless enough to leave home at all, but we have acted like idiots in not returning as soon as we noticed that the Indians were not scattered about, hunting, as they always have been at this time of the year."

"Oh, that 's nothing, we 've just happened to miss them; that 's all," said I with an assurance I did not feel, for Herm's seriousness startled me. My own woodcraft and knowledge of Indian habits should have pointed out the danger in a circumstance so unusual and suspicious. I was vexed that it had not.

"No," said Herm, "we have paddled up the river for forty miles, and hunted the country all over, and have n't seen an Indian, nor found a single fresh camp. What does it all mean? Why, it can mean but one thing, and that is that they have been getting ready for a mas-

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sacre. It's probably all over with before this time, and unless they were warned, our folks have been killed and scalped, and everything burned down."

There were tears in his eyes as he spoke, and I felt the truth of what he had said. It was plain to me, now that I thought the matter over seriously, and my mind was filled with apprehension.

"I believe you are right," I replied. "We must start for home right off. Perhaps it is n't too late yet."

We immediately struck our tent and made things snug in the canoe. We placed the bundle of deerskins in the stern behind Herm, and one sack of meat in the bow in front of me, while the rest of the load was stowed amidships, leaving a space about four feet from each end large enough for us to sit or kneel in while paddling.

With so late a start it would be long after dark before we got home. Plying our paddles

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with a will we soon reached the mouth of the creek, and shot our canoe out into the middle of the river in order to get the full benefit of the current.

We did not think of seeing Indians as we came out of the mouth of the creek, and did not stop to reconnoitre before venturing into the river. Imagine our consternation, when, just as we reached the middle, happening to glance up the stream behind us, we saw a large canoe containing six Sioux warriors coming down toward us as fast as their half dozen paddles could send their craft through the water.

“Bend low—paddle for your life!” Herm called to me, and our canoe fairly jumped with our strokes.

HIDE AND SEEK WITH SIOUX

HERM AND I

CHAPTER III

HIDE AND SEEK WITH SIOUX

ONE glance at the Indian canoe had told us that the Sioux meant mischief, for their painted bodies declared them braves on the war-path. As if to dispel any doubt of their intentions, they quickened their stroke and yelled fiercely when they saw that we had discovered them.

I own that I was almost paralyzed with fear; but Herm, the quiet, blue-eyed German, whom you would have thought too timid and gentle-natured to fight anything, was as cool as if there had been no Indian within a hundred miles.

"Keep your head down!" he said. "They may take to shooting," and before we had gone a hundred yards he called out again:

"Steer for the right bank! We 've got to

HERM AND I

land and take our chances in the grass. They 'll catch us in less than half a mile at this rate."

Our canoe was heavily loaded, and two paddles were no match for six. Seeing a stretch of sloping, sandy shore ahead, we made for it with all our might. The Sioux saw our object, and coming within rifle range before we could land, dropped their paddles, and snatching up their guns, fired a volley after us.

But to shoot straight from a dancing canoe when one's hands are trembling from the paddle is in no man's power. The Indians did wonders under the circumstances.

One of the bullets lodged in the bundle of deerskins behind Herm, while the rest whistled past our ears, one of them barely grazing Herm's left shoulder as he bent forward, inflicting a slight but painful skin wound. Had it not been for his stooping posture, and the bundle of deerskins behind him, he might have been killed outright.

HERM AND I

The Sioux made a great mistake in firing at us while we were in the canoe. Had they reserved their bullets until we sprang ashore on the sloping beach, they might have killed one or both of us.



"They quickened their stroke"

We were going so fast that the canoe ran half its length out of the water up on the sandy shore. Before the Sioux could reload their guns, we seized our rifles, ran up the bank, and dashed into the tall bottom grass.

HERM AND I

On the right bank at this place the river bottoms were about a mile wide, and clear of timber. In fact, there was no woodland on that side of the stream for some miles, though the left bank was heavily timbered. Could we have landed there, we should have been pretty sure of escaping, but the left bank was high and steep, and the current there so rapid that it would have been almost impossible for us to get ashore.

The dense growth of swamp grass and wild rice, often taller than a man's head, which covered the ground over which we fled, enabled us to get out of sight in a twinkling.

"They 'll be right after us!" exclaimed Herm, "and they are likely to get our scalps! But we won't lose them without doing what we can to keep them.

"Come on!" he shouted, as he saw that I was not keeping up with his rapid pace. "Keep behind me, and as we run tramp down all the grass you can."

HERM AND I

We ran as fast as we could, leaving a plain trail behind us. We knew the Sioux, as soon as they could reload their guns, would follow on the run. What Herm's plan was I did not conjecture, but his courage was contagious, and after my first fright was over, I soon lost all sense of fear, and thought only of how to fight wisely in the defence to which I foresaw that we must soon be forced.

Herm seemed fiercer than I. Thoughts of his mother and brothers at home, probably murdered and scalped in cold blood, together with the smarting pain of his wound, seemed to have changed his nature. His face was pale with passion, his fighting German blood was up, and his blue eyes blazed balefully. He had inherited from his German parents that intense love of home and kindred which fires the blood of the German soldier, and makes him the most formidable of foes when fighting in defence of "Vaterland."

"Don't miss when you shoot!" he called

HERM AND I

back to me over his shoulder in a clear, low, steady tone. "Be sure you hit an Indian every time you fire. There 's only one chance for us to get out of this alive, and that is by disabling every one of the murdering wretches."

On we ran, until I was about to drop for lack of breath. The Indians had found our trail and were following it, yelling like demons. Herm slackened his pace, and when I came up he stopped short.

"Now," said he, "when I jump, you jump after me, and in my tracks!"

Springing off to the left as far as we could, and at right angles with our former course, we ran in a straight line in that direction for a few yards, when Herm squatted down and motioned me to do the same.

"Now," said he, "it 's likely one or two of the best runners will be ahead; and they will lose our trail for a moment where we jumped off. They will stop and look around to see which way we have gone. Now you shoot the

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first one that comes in sight, and look out that you don't miss him. As soon as we 've fired we 'll run on again, and while the rest of them stop to see what 's the matter, and look for our trail, we can get a good way ahead. If they keep on following us, we 'll dodge off one side and play the same trick again."

By the yells of the Indians, which now came plainly to us, it was evident that one or two of them were in advance of the rest. We had barely time to recover our breath and steady our nerves a little as we squatted in the grass, our rifles cocked and our eyes directed down the opening which our short, straight trail made in the tall grass, when the foremost Indian dashed up to where we had jumped aside.

He seemed perplexed at the sudden termination of the trail, and looking around to see where we had gone, turned his broad, painted breast squarely toward us. Then he caught sight of our trail, and of us at the same moment, but before he could raise his rifle I fired.

HERM AND I

Throwing up his long arms, he fell forward in the grass.

I started to run the instant I fired, but Herm had heard another Sioux coming, close behind the first one, and waited for him to show himself in the opening. Before I had taken more than half a dozen jumps I heard my chum's rifle. Of course I could not see the Indian, but I knew his fate as well as if I had seen him fall.

Herm quickly overtook and passed me. We bounded along through the tall rice and grass, and then made another angle, so that the other four Sioux could not see us while running up.

Yells more savage than before told us when they stumbled upon their comrades. It was evident they had not expected much resistance from us, and I have no doubt they had thought that the shots they heard had been fired by their companions.

On account of the two angles we had made it may have taken some time to find our trail

HERM AND I

again, or perhaps they stopped to debate their course, for we were able to get a good distance ahead of them. But how we did run! We knew our lives depended upon gaining enough ground to enable us to reload before they overtook us; and although the grass was very thick and tall, we tore through it at a tremendous pace.

The sharp blades rasped our cheeks and wrists until our faces and hands were streaming with blood.

We were now running parallel with the river, and were nearly out of breath again, when Herm jumped off to one side and I followed. Leaving a straight, open trail behind us, and stopping within easy range of the angle as we had done before, we squatted down and began loading our rifles.

"Don't hurry," whispered Herm; "load carefully. We've got time enough, and it won't do to miss fire. They'll all come in a bunch this time, and we must drop two of them and take our chances with the other two."

HERM AND I

The Indians were either too much excited and enraged to notice anything like a trick in the way we had ambushed their companions, or thought we could not find time to reload and would prove easy victims this time. This came very near being the case, for we had barely rammed down our bullets when the whole four came in sight.

They stopped as before at the end of our trail, and seemed to suspect some ruse. Before they caught sight of us we had capped our guns, and were aiming at the two in the centre of the group. The moment we fired we wheeled and ran direct for the river, bending as low as possible, surmising that the two remaining Indians would fire at the moving grass, hoping to hit us. Our surmise was correct. They did shoot, but their bullets flew wild.

I thought Herm's plan was to take to the canoe, but before we reached the river he snatched off his cap and mine also.

HERM AND I

"Shove the canoe into the river!" he shouted, as we rushed down the bank; and while I did as directed he ran alongside. Stuffing grass into each cap and placing one on the end of each paddle, he leaned them against the bundle of deerskins and sacks of meat in such a way that they looked as the tops of our heads might have looked had we been trying vainly to conceal ourselves entirely behind the gunwale of the canoe.

Giving the canoe a tremendous push we sent it out into the middle of the stream. Then we ran up the bank on our first trail, followed the now broad path into the grass, and squatting down to one side began to reload as rapidly as possible.

We were hardly out of sight before the two Sioux ran down to the bank. They gave an exultant yell as they saw our caps sticking up over the edge of the canoe. Lest we should have loaded first and should take a shot at them from the canoe they dodged back into the

HERM AND I

grass to reload. We dared not make the slightest noise; and they had their guns loaded and capped before we had our bullets down.

Soon they left the grass to get nearer to our canoe; and we thanked our stars that they had been so completely deceived by the caps that they never thought of looking for us in the grass. We took our time to load, and then crept to the edge of the grass to watch them.

“Don’t shoot while they are moving,” whispered Herm, “but wait until they take aim at our caps, and then let them have it.”

We did not have long to wait. The canoe was moving along with the current, first one end ahead then the other, and as soon as it swung round so that it once more presented its broadside to the bank, both Indians dropped on their knees and took deliberate aim at the caps.

“Now ’s our time!” whispered Herm. “You take the nearest one.”

We all fired so nearly at the same instant that the four shots—the Sioux’s and our own—

HERM AND I

almost blended in one report. We waited long enough to see that both of our shots had taken effect. Then we ran, shoved the Indians'



" Took deliberate aim "

canoe into the river, and paddled down stream in it until we overtook our own.

Landing both canoes and dragging them out

HERM AND I

of sight in the grass, we loaded our guns once more and went back to where the two Indians lay on the bank. They appeared to be lifeless. It was a bitter thought that we had in all probability ended several fellow-beings' lives; but surely every law of self-defence had justified our course.

Lest some other war party, passing up or down the river, should discover them, we dragged the bodies of these two men out of sight in the grass. Then we took their rifles and ammunition and crept through the grass to the canoes.

Now that we had time to think of something beside our own peril, we were filled with the most gloomy forebodings as to the fate of our folks at home. We had no doubt that the Sioux had planned a general massacre, and unless our families had been warned in time we knew what their fate must have been.

It was not yet later than noon, and we knew that it could not be safe for us to embark again

HERM AND I

before dark. Not daring to make a fire, we ate some of our dried venison and some cold flap-jacks left from our breakfast.

After creeping down to the edge of the water for a drink, and to bathe our scratched and bleeding hands and faces, we stretched ourselves in the grass near the bank where we could see if any one passed up or down the stream. I examined Herm's wound, finding it only skin deep, and not likely to cause him much inconvenience after the first smarting was over.

Then we happened to think of our caps, which we had hurriedly replaced upon our heads without looking to see if the Indians had hit them. We found a ragged bullet-hole in each; and the handle of my paddle upon which my cap had rested was shivered into splinters, so that I was obliged to take one from the canoe of the Indians to replace it. Soon I proposed to go back and take from the dead Indians their rifles and ammunition. But Herm would not hear of this.

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"No," said he, "some of them may be only wounded. If any man of them is alive he will be watching for us. We can't afford to take any such chances." And so we remained where we were.

Luckily for us the clouds gathered before night, and rain came with a strong northwest wind. When it was quite dark we launched our canoe, and with the wind to help us sped down-stream at a rate which, at any other time, we should have considered hazardous. But we thought little of danger to ourselves, so great was our anxiety to learn the fate of those we had left at home.

We reached the upper settlement about midnight. Smoldering fires were all that remained of its comfortable log houses and barns.

Our worst fears seemed to have been realized. Yet one hope remained. Our mothers might have been warned in time and escaped to the fort.

We plied our paddles with renewed vigor, and at dawn were within a mile of home.

HERM AND I

Landing at the first convenient spot, we dragged the canoe into some thick brush near the bank. When it was fairly daylight, we



“The Indians had been thorough in their work”

crept cautiously along the bank toward the spot where my father's house had stood.

The sight which greeted us was enough to bring woe to any heart. Worn out with fa-

HERM AND I

tigue and loss of sleep, and having eaten scarcely anything for twenty-four hours, we were unable to restrain our grief; and tears ran down my cheeks as I gazed upon the spot which had been such a happy home to me.

Everything was in ashes. Even the fences and woodpile were burned. We turned away and went in the direction of Mr. Weisman's house. Herm thought that, as their place was some distance back from the river, it might have escaped the general destruction. But the Indians had been thorough in their ruthless work. House, barn, haystacks were burned to the ground.

We had not dared to show ourselves in the open ground for fear some of the Sioux might be lurking near, ready to shoot down any one who should venture back to the settlement. But as the day advanced we reconnoitered the woods, and not finding any fresh signs of Indians, determined to examine the ruins of our lost homes, in hopes of obtaining some clue to the fate of the two families.

CAPTURING A FLEET

HERM AND I

CHAPTER IV

CAPTURING A FLEET

FROM the shore near the ashes of my father's house the family bateau was gone. We had noticed that at first.

But something we had not noticed, and which kindled hope the instant I caught sight of it, was mother's old rocking-chair. It stood close to the river bank, where the bateau had always been tied.

It was not simply that a familiar object, saved from the general ruin, caused my heart to leap with joy. The old rocking-chair had a world of meaning to me. I knew that it would be the first piece of furniture mother would think of saving in case they had been warned and had fled to the fort for safety.

The chair had been in her family for three

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generations. She had brought it from her Pennsylvania home when she and father were married and moved out West, and money would not have induced her to part with it.

I rushed down to the bank regardless of Indians. Yes, the families had surely made their escape, for the path was well trodden where they had passed back and forth, carrying things from the house to the boat, and the footprints were those of boots and shoes, not moccasins. Mother had probably found at the last moment that there was not room in the bateau for the chair, or they had left hurriedly and had been forced to leave it. We could not help believing that our loved ones were probably safe in the fort.

On our way back to the canoe we found the dead body of one of my pet steers which the Sioux had killed for beef. I had taken a great deal of pains training the animal and his mate, and when I found him killed I was angry enough to wish to annihilate the whole Sioux

HERM AND I

tribe. But we were ravenously hungry, and could not fire our guns for fear of Indians who, we were certain, must be camped near the river not far away. So I cut into the carcass



"Mother's old rocking-chair"

of my lamented steer. The Indians had taken only the hindquarters, and the rest of the meat was still good. We took as much as we thought we should need and carried it back to the canoe.

HERM AND I

Then, taking our coffee-pot, with some sugar and salt, we went back from the river about half a mile to a deep, rocky ravine, where we thought it might be safe to make a fire. Gathering an armful of dry oak twigs, which would cause little smoke, we made a pot of coffee, broiled slices of beef on the coals, and ate the first meal we had had for twenty-four hours.

The fresh meat and warm drink, after so long a fast, and our fatigue made us drowsy. So, finding a thick patch of grass in a sunny nook, we threw ourselves down and were soon fast asleep.

It was about the middle of the forenoon when we lay down, and so tired and worn were we that it was nearly sundown before we awoke. The food and rest had done us a world of good. We woke up feeling nearly as hungry as ever; and not knowing how long it might be, or how much fatigue we should have to endure before we reached the fort, we started our fire again, and ate a hearty supper.

HERM AND I

Just at dark we reached the river, and were about to drag the canoe from its hiding-place when Herm said:

"I think we had better not try to reach the fort to-night."

"Why," said I, "what 's the matter?"

"You know well enough there must be Indians all along the river. It was cloudy and dark last night, and no one could see us; but to-night it will be bright moonlight. And if we happen to pass any camps, the reds will be likely to see us. The moon rose night before last about eight. To-night it will be up about two hours later, and we can't get half way to the fort by that time."

"Perhaps you are right," I answered. "I 'm inclined to think we had better wait a day or two. It may get cloudy again, and by our waiting the moon will come up late enough for us to reach the fort before it rises."

"That 's what I was thinking," said Herm. "We can take our blankets and a few things back to the ravine, and hide there."

HERM AND I

"Whis-st!" said I, throwing myself flat upon the ground as a familiar sound caught my ear. Herm followed my example.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"Paddles," said I. "Don't you hear them?"

"Yes, I do now," he replied, "and there are a dozen or more of them. It's lucky we did n't put out."

We lay on the bank, peering up stream in the direction of the sounds, and could hear the regular stroke of many paddles. When they were just opposite us we could discern four long canoes, one behind the other, with four or five Indians in each canoe. We waited until they were past and out of hearing; then we piled more brush and grass over our canoe, and scratched the loose, dry soil over with bushes to obliterate our tracks as much as possible. Taking our blankets, with what provisions we could carry easily, we went back to the ravine.

Finding the spot where we had slept during

HERM AND I

the day, we curled up in our blankets for a good night's rest. We were not very sleepy, and lay awake for a long time discussing the events of the past few days. We felt sure that our people were safe at the fort, and that we must not think of starting down the river for three days at least, if the weather remained clear.

"We shall have to paddle like racers to reach the fort before the moon comes up then," said Herm. "And to-morrow we had better see if we can find any of our cattle."

"All right," said I, "we will. We ought to find out all we can to tell the folks at the fort."

We slept late the next morning, and after cooking our breakfast, started off in the direction in which we expected to find the stock. I knew that mother, if there had been time for it, would have caused the cattle to be driven a distance of several miles back from the river, to a piece of low, wet land, covered with scattering timber.

HERM AND I

Though the dry season had dried up all the grass upon the higher lands, this low, damp soil had kept the feed fresh and green; and being several miles from the nearest house, this was the best possible place to hide the cattle from the Indians. Keeping along the bottoms of deep ravines, and in the thick timber where we were pretty well concealed, we soon reached this swamp, and were delighted to find the stock, both ours and Mr. Weisman's, grazing contentedly. Not a single head was missing, except that luckless steer of mine, which had probably been overlooked when the rest were driven away.

The two cow-bells had been taken from the necks of the old cows that always led the herd, lest their noise should reveal the presence of the stock to the Indians. This pleased us greatly, for we reasoned that those who had found time to take such precautions concerning the cattle would also be in time in looking to their own safety.

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Returning to the ravine by noon, we ate our lunch and crept down to the river to see if our canoe was all right, and to watch for signs of the Sioux. Hiding in thick brush near the bank, we watched the stream all the afternoon without seeing anything of the Indians; and then we returned to the ravine at dark.

Early the next morning we went down to the river again, taking a cooked lunch with us, intending to stay there all day, as we thought we should be more likely to discover the movements of the Sioux by watching the stream than by reconnoitering on land, and with much less danger to ourselves. We lay in the bushes until nearly sundown without seeing a canoe.

To our great joy the sky became overcast with clouds as night approached, and we looked forward to a dark, rainy night, which would enable us to reach the fort and our friends. We were about to return to the ravine to cook our supper and get ready for an early start, when, on taking a last look up and

HERM AND I

down the river, we caught sight, just rounding the bend below, of four large canoes—probably the same ones we had seen pass down-stream two evenings before.

“There are only two in each canoe this time,” whispered Herm.

“And the canoes are loaded from stem to stern,” I responded. “I wonder what they’ve got aboard. We’ll soon see, anyway.”

“Why, they are squaws, don’t you see? Every one of them!” said Herm, almost jumping to his feet in astonishment.

“Sure enough!” I replied, “and the canoes are loaded with blankets, quilts, sacks of flour, hams and pork.”

“I’ll tell you what it means,” interrupted Herm. “They think there is n’t a white man left nearer than the fort, and this is some of the plunder they’ve taken out of houses before burning them. They’ve sent for the squaws to come and tote it up the river, where it will be safe when the soldiers get after them.”

HERM AND I

As the canoes came up abreast of us, we saw that the squaws seemed tired, and we concluded they would camp before going much farther.

"They're looking for a camping place now," said Herm.

Suddenly an idea occurred to me that seemed full of promise. I looked so delighted that Herm exclaimed, "Well! What's the matter now?"

"What's the matter?" I repeated, "why, don't you see that if those squaws camp anywhere near here, we can probably bag the whole outfit and tow it to the fort."

"What!" said Herm, with no little contempt, "you would n't shoot squaws, would you?"

"I'm not going to shoot anybody," I rejoined. "It's the canoes we're after. Why, there may be a hundred dollars' worth of stuff in every one of them, and we can capture them and not half try. The squaws won't unload them, nor even drag them out of the water;

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they 're too heavy. They 'll simply tie them up to the bank and take out what blankets they want to sleep on, and some things to cook with, and camp on the bank where there 's plenty of wood handy. It 's beginning to sprinkle now, and it will be as dark a night as we can ask for."

"I 'm with you," said Herm. "We can do it, and it will be fun. Won't those squaws tear around when they wake up in the morning and find themselves afoot and ashore!"

We watched them as they paddled past us, and pulled in to the opposite shore a few hundred yards above. They made their canoes fast to the willows which grew along the edge of the water, and began to take out blankets and pots and kettles, and carry them up on the bank.

They hung some blankets over two saplings which they bent down and tied together to make a sort of tent to protect them from the rain, and spread other blankets over the tops of the canoes to keep their contents dry.

HERM AND I

We waited to see no more, but hurried back to the ravine, cooked and ate our supper, gathered our things together, and returned to the canoe as quickly as we could.



“ They bent down saplings ”

A drizzling rain was falling, and it was already so dark that we could hardly see each other; but we thought it wise to give the

HERM AND I

squaws plenty of time to eat their supper, and get settled for the night, before venturing near their camp.

"We 'll be all right," said Herm, "if they have n't any dogs to smell us, and I don't think they have. I could n't see any in the canoes."

"Not a dog that I could see," said I. "Probably they won't know a thing about it until morning, and we 'll have the canoes at the fort by the time they find they 're gone."

We knew the squaws would soon be asleep after their hard day's work. When we had waited about an hour, we launched our canoe and paddled across and up the stream until within about two hundred yards of their camp.

As I had suggested the capture, I was to take the lead. We fastened our canoe to the shore, and I left Herm there to catch the boats when I should set them adrift. Then I took off my clothes, and with my knife in my hand, crept toward the squaws' camp.

The night was so dark that I could hardly



“ A little cur sprang out ”

HERM AND I

tell when I was near it, except by the clump of willows to which they had tied the canoes. When I was near enough to make these out, I took to the water, and approached them from the side farthest from the camp.

I reached the first canoe without hearing a sound, and was feeling along its side for the thong which I must cut in order to set it adrift, when, with a perfect torrent of yelps and barks, a little cur, about the size of a large cat, sprang out from among the blankets, almost in my face.

The instant the dog struck the water, which was about two feet deep, I seized him with both hands, forced him to the bottom and held him there.

I heard a commotion in the tent as the dog began to bark. One or two of the squaws seemed to come outside, but it was too dark for me to see them. They called to the dog. Not hearing any further noise from him, I suppose they thought he was barking at some

HERM AND I

prowling animal. So they went back to their beds.

I waited for some time to give them a chance to go to sleep again. Then I cut the canoe loose, and sent it floating down the stream close to the shore.

Waiting a few minutes after cutting each one loose, to give Herm time to catch it, I sent the boats adrift one after another, holding onto the last one and floating down with it.

I was afraid Herm might let some of them get past him in the darkness, but when he seized firmly the one to which I was holding, I discovered that he had secured all.

While he had been waiting, Herm had cut four stout straps, about five feet long, off one of our deerskins. These he soaked in the water to make them soft and pliable, and made a slip-noose at both ends of each. By slipping these over the "nose" at the bow of one canoe and the stern of another, it took us but a moment to fasten the whole five together in a string, with our own in the lead.

HERM AND I

"That 's pretty good so far," whispered Herm, as we were getting into our clothes, "but I thought the game was up when I heard that dog bark."



"The whole five in a string"

He was greatly pleased when I told him what stopped the dog's barking so suddenly.

"Well, we 're having some fun out of it, anyhow," said he, "but we 've a hard night's work ahead of us if we pull that string of canoes to the fort."

HERM AND I

“Yes, but they ’re worth it,” I replied. “I ’d do it just for the fun of the thing if nothing else.”

We had some difficulty in getting the canoes out to the middle of the river, but once there they gave us little trouble. Following in each other’s wake they ran much easier than we expected.

It was well for us that we had had several days’ rest with unlimited roast beef, for paddling is not easy work, and although the canoes towed easily, considering the great weight they carried, our paddles failed to send us through the water at the speed we were accustomed to.

So we were not long in finding that we had, in getting to the fort, more of an undertaking than we had anticipated.

FUN AT THE FORT

HERM AND I

CHAPTER V

FUN AT THE FORT

WE could not see the banks that dark and rainy night as we went down river with our captured canoes, but the noise of the wind in the tree-tops and bushes along the shore enabled us to keep well in the middle.

"Let's take a long, easy stroke," said Herm; "one that we can keep up till morning, for it's going to be an all night's job. We'll make the fort all right; nobody can see or hear us with this wind and darkness. At the rate we are going, we shall reach the fort before daylight."

"We're good for it," I responded. "I'd paddle twice as far if I could just see those squaws when they come to look for their canoes in the morning. But won't we surprise

HERM AND I

them at the fort? I guess there are hundreds of people there besides our own folks; and like as not lots of these things in the canoes belong to some of them."

We talked now and then in a low tone. This, with the hope of soon seeing our mothers, brothers and sisters, and thoughts of the praise we should receive if we got these canoes safe to the fort, served to keep up our strength and spirits.

We had been to the fort in the bateau half a dozen times, knew every turn in the river, and were able to tell by these where we were, although we could get but the vaguest glimpses of shore. The wind was in the west, and helped us well, except in sharp bends where we had to run against it.

But it seemed as if daylight would never come. We were wet through with the drizzling rain, and had been looking for hours for the great bend which the river made about half a mile above the fort. It was not until daylight began to show that we reached it.

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We paddled harder until we were far enough around the bend to see the lights at the fort. The sentry, pacing the bank in front, had already seen the five canoes, and supposing them to contain Indians, had given the alarm. We could see men flying about in all directions.

We knew they had a few small cannon, and were afraid they might open fire upon us; so we stood up, waved our caps, and shouted until we were hoarse. The soldiers soon saw that we were not Indians; and when we reached the landing, not only the garrison—mostly old men and boys—but all of the families who had sought shelter at the fort were on the bank to meet us.

You may be sure that our mothers, my sisters and Herm's brothers were in the front rank. When we were near enough to be recognized, all began shouting and cheering. A dozen hands grasped each canoe the moment it touched the shore, and carried it up the bank.

HERM AND I

There was more shouting as first one family, then another, recognized among the things being taken out of the canoes clothing, bedding and other household goods which had been stolen from their own homes. It seemed that the whole lot had been taken from one settlement, whose people had been warned so late that they barely had time to escape with their lives.

They all crowded around to hear our story; but mother, noticing our exhaustion, took us in charge. Leading us to the tent in which our two families were living, she prepared for us a warm breakfast and put us to sleep in the bed which Herm's two brothers had vacated a few minutes before. We slept until noon, and awoke feeling not much the worse for our night's exertions, except for lame backs and arms.

The commanding officer had left word that he wished to see us as soon as we were rested. When we had donned clean clothes, we repaired to headquarters and found that officer.



" She prepared a warm breakfast "

HERM AND I

He was a fat, jolly old man, and greeted us with great cordiality.

"The people here have felt much anxiety on your account," he said. "They were all anxious to hear how you escaped, and how you captured those canoes. My quarters are too small to accommodate the whole crowd, but if you will come out in the open grounds, I 'll call the people together to hear your story."

Now I was vain enough of our exploits, but this was more parade than I cared for. We could not very well refuse, however. I knew Herm was too modest and bashful to say a word before such a crowd, and that I should have all the talking to do.

There were at least four hundred people at the fort, beside the garrison. All gathered in a group in front the officers' quarters to hear our tale. The old captain had a chair brought out for the speaker to stand upon, and after a few words of explanation, he beckoned to me to take the chair.

HERM AND I

I could feel the color leaving my face. My knees shook as though I had the ague, and I presume I was about as badly scared as when we first saw those six painted Sioux coming after us. But I had an appreciative audience. They began to cheer and applaud before I opened my mouth.

I was a pretty glib talker usually, and once I got started the laughter and cheering caused me to forget about myself. So I rattled on at a great rate. I thought the crowd would go wild when I told them how we robbed the squaws of their stolen plunder, and left them to swim home or go afoot, as they might prefer.

The old captain listened to our story with as much interest as any one, laughed and shook his fat sides. I think he believed every word of it, but he always tried to make us think that he doubted some parts of the story. He never met us without stopping to exchange a few words in his rough jolly way.

HERM AND I

“That ’s pretty good, boys,” he would say, “but don’t you really think you ought to let some of those Indians get away? Of course you killed them all, but six big Indians sounds rather too many, and some folks might think you saw double or treble. Two are a great plenty. If I were you, I ’d let the other four go, seeing you did n’t bring in their rifles.”

Then with a burst of laughter he would turn on his heel. We never took offence, for his manner was always jovial, but we did wish we had brought in four more rifles, and we said so, which amused the old fellow greatly.

We were too happy to sleep that first night, and sat up until after twelve, chatting with our brothers and sisters. They told us the outbreak occurred within a week after we left home. A man came down the river two days before it happened, warning the settlers to fly for their lives, as he knew a band of several hundred Sioux warriors were camped about twenty miles up river.

HERM AND I

So mother got the stock driven back into the swamp, and the bateau loaded with provisions and goods. She said she tried hard to make room for the old rocking-chair, but could not do so without leaving something that was necessary.

The bateau was rigged with four oars. Herm's two brothers manned two of these, while my two sisters, mother and Mrs. Weisman took turns keeping the other two going. Although the craft was loaded down almost to the water's edge, they contrived to reach the fort late that same night.

We stayed doing garrison duty at the fort until late in October. Scouts were sent out in all directions every day to discover if Indians lurked in the vicinity. When Herm and I had the choice of going out with the teams to the nearest timber to bring in firewood, or of acting as scouts, we never chose to go for fuel.

The attention we attracted when we first reached the fort made us somewhat conceited,

HERM AND I

and we were probably a little too fond of relating our exploits, as most boys are likely to be. After a fortnight of this some of the garrison concluded to lower our dignity a little, and have some fun at our expense. I fancy the old captain was at the bottom of the affair, for he seemed to get more fun out of it than any one else.

One day the scouts came in just before dark and reported fresh moccasin tracks along the river bank a mile above the fort. This was a false story arranged as part of the trap for Herm and me. Those in the secret manifested great excitement, and the captain immediately called for two volunteers to go up river and wait until after nightfall, when the Indians, if any were near, would be moving about, and enable the scouts to see if they were planning a night attack.

If we had known much about Indian warfare we might have detected the ruse, for no prudent commander would have allowed a man to

HERM AND I

leave the fort under the pretended circumstances. But we never stopped to think of this. The practical jokers reckoned that we would offer our services as scouts, as we did.

The captain accepted and told us not to take our guns, as it was already so dark we could not see to shoot accurately, but to creep up the river as far as we thought prudent, and hasten back if we sighted Indians. As soon as we were out of sight, two young fellows who had been dressed up to resemble Indians crept along behind us. We did not notice them until we reached the big bend, half a mile above the fort. Herm saw them first.

"Bart!" he whispered, "don't stop, nor don't get scared, but just look over your shoulder. There 's two Indians right behind us."

I did n't stop, but I did get scared.

"What shall we do, Herm?" I inquired.

"Keep right on until we get around the bend, and then make a break straight across for the fort."

HERM AND I

The curve in the river at this point described about a semicircle, and when we had got clear around the bend the Indians were just about in the middle of it. Our plan was to dash across the neck of land and get past them. But when we started to run, they whooped fiercely and rushed to head us off. They had much the shorter distance to run, and were between us and the fort in a twinkling.

We knew no two Indians would be prowling so near the fort by themselves. We expected to see their comrades spring up on every side when the two yelled. Our only hope was to get back to the fort, and regardless of consequences we dashed straight at the pair.

When we turned to run I picked up a poplar stick about the size of a baseball bat. Herm could not find even a club, but we were both desperate and felt that strength which comes to men when they feel that their lives are at stake.

The "Indians" acted queerly, but we did not

HERM AND I

think what this might signify. They stood squarely in our path, waving their arms and yelling like madmen. We thought they were calling their comrades as we rushed upon them.

I swung my club and made for one of them. He threw off his blanket, and with a loud laugh, turned to jump out of my way. I saw he was a white man too late to stop my club, which took him across the shoulders with a great "whack," and sent him sprawling on the ground. I began to laugh, then, at the joke, but Herm was not so amiable.

His temper, not easily aroused, was, when once excited, very hard to quiet. I think he saw the joke before I did, but he had been much frightened, and when he understood the trick, his fright turned to anger. He made for his man with a fierce shout.

I presume he thought he had done enough genuine fighting to be spared such an attempt to make him ridiculous. At any rate he "pummeled" the man with all his strength.

HERM AND I

“Hold on! Hold on! I ’m no Indian!” the fellow shouted. But down he went, with Herm on top, raining blows upon his prostrate form.



“ ‘ Hold on! I ’m no Indian! ’ ”

“Indian or no Indian, take that! and that! and that!” he shouted. I don’t know when he would have stopped if I had not recovered from my laughing fit and pulled him off.

HERM AND I

Herm's "Indian" was a sorry-looking object when we got back to the fort. His nose was still bleeding, and both eyes were swollen until they were almost closed.

Of course every man and boy in the fort was watching for our return. The garrison had expected that we would take to the river or stay out in the woods half the night for fear of the two "Indians." Great was the amazement when we marched both in as prisoners.

"Here 's your Indians!" Herm shouted, as we gave them a shove toward a group which contained the captain.

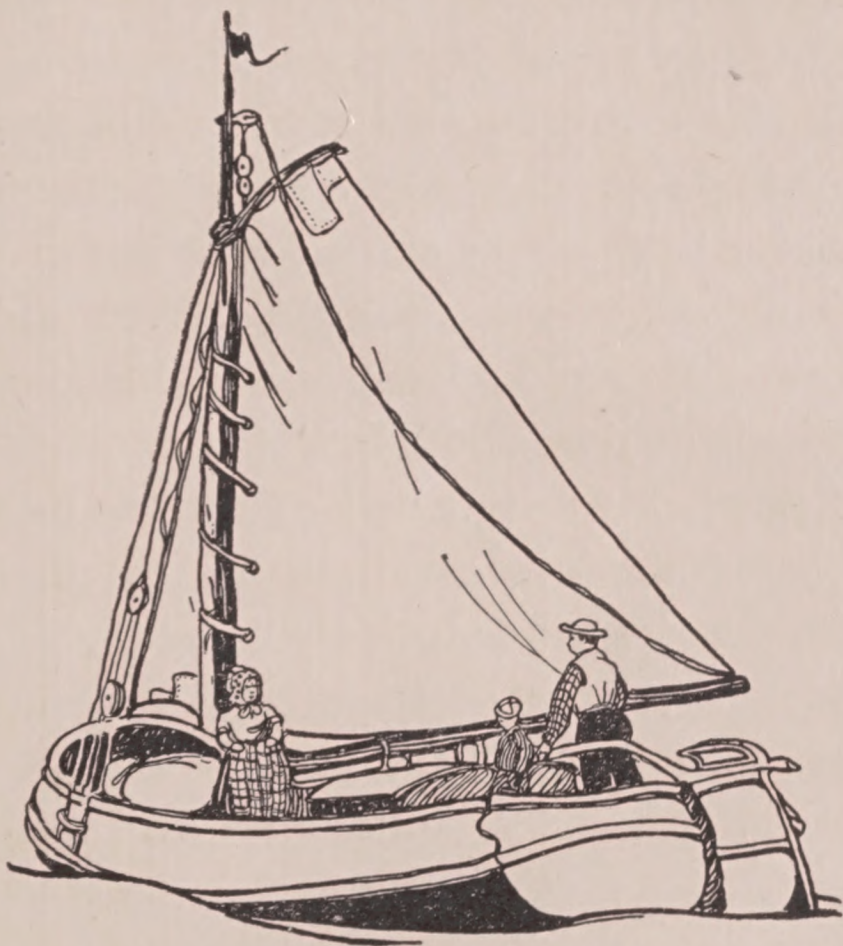
Such shouts of derision as greeted those wretched jokers! The one who suffered most was called nothing but "Herm's Indian" as long as he stayed at the fort.

There we waited until late in the fall, when the military forces had driven the savages far from the settlements, so that the people could return to their homes in safety.

We had rigged a sail for the bateau, and

HERM AND I

took advantage of a good breeze up-stream to start for home. Thanks to that old bateau,



“ Thanks to that old bateau ”

mother had been able to save nearly all of our household goods except the furniture. We had now two canoes, our own and one of those

HERM AND I

we captured, loaded with provisions that had been allotted to us from the supplies which the people of cities and towns farther east had sent to the relief of the raided settlements.

Mother and the girls cried not a little when we first came in sight of the old place; but thankful to get back alive, we all set at work with a will to put things in shape for the winter. We built a long, low log house, with two rooms below and a loft above for us boys to sleep in, so that one house might do for both families that winter.

We found all the stock alive and in fair condition. Our hay had been all burned, and most of the grass near the settlements had been burned off by the Sioux. But by going several miles up the river to the marsh we cut several tons of coarse, dry, nutritious grass, and brought it home in the bateau. It was not very good hay, but would do to winter a few of the best cows upon.

We had to keep one yoke of steers for our

HERM AND I

hauling. The rest of the stock we drove to the fort and sold. Beef was very high, and received a good price. So we had money enough to buy a year's provisions, and seed grain and farming implements when spring came.

Of course we missed our regular trapping trip that fall, but we trapped around home all winter, and with the twenty-five dollars each which we received for the captured Indian rifles, we were not much out of pocket by foregoing our sport.

We had no school that winter. Herm and I spent all of our time, except two days each week which we devoted to our traps, in getting out timber for a barn and for fences. For the next two or three years we had to work very hard to repair the damage the Sioux had done us.

Sometimes, indeed, we thought we had too much to do and that our lot in life was a hard one. But it was just that hard work, and being obliged, as we were, to rely wholly upon our

HERM AND I

own resources, that made men of us, and developed in us a faculty of recognizing opportunities, and being able to take advantage of them, which has been of great value to us all our days.

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